

OVERCROWDING IN FUNGUS GENERIC NAMES

This short note is aimed at those who are considering, or who may at some future date consider, the erection of a new genus of fungi.

The alphabetic arrangement of fungus generic names in indexes shows evidence of a considerable, if unconscious, emphasis on certain initial letters, and a corresponding neglect of others. If we assume that the generic names listed in Clements and Shear "The Genera of Fungi" are a representative and statistically sound sample, it becomes possible to produce quantitative evidence of the existing imbalance. The accompanying histogram (FIG. 1) shows the numbers of such names which begin with each letter of the alphabet, the letters being arranged in descending order of frequency of occurrence. The disproportion is very large. 801 names begin with P, and only 3 with Q; 678 begin with C, and only 5 with Y. This imbalance has practical consequences. It is becoming increasingly difficult, both to avoid accidental homonymy, and to arrive at a first syllable which is at once meaningful and unique, in the erection of a name beginning with P, C, S, or M. In the 5th edition of Ainsworth and Bisby's "Dictionary of the Fungi," no fewer than 136 generic names are listed which begin with the prefix "Pseudo. . ."; 103 begin with "Phaeo . . ."; 70 begin with "Poly. . .". As

if to point up the dangers of homonymy, the same source lists 27 examples of homonyms beginning with P. Even if homonymy is avoided, the chances of confusion among such overlapping names as *Capnodium*, *Capnodina*, *Capnodinula*, *Capnodiella*, *Capnodiopsis*, and *Capnodias-trum*, are quite high.

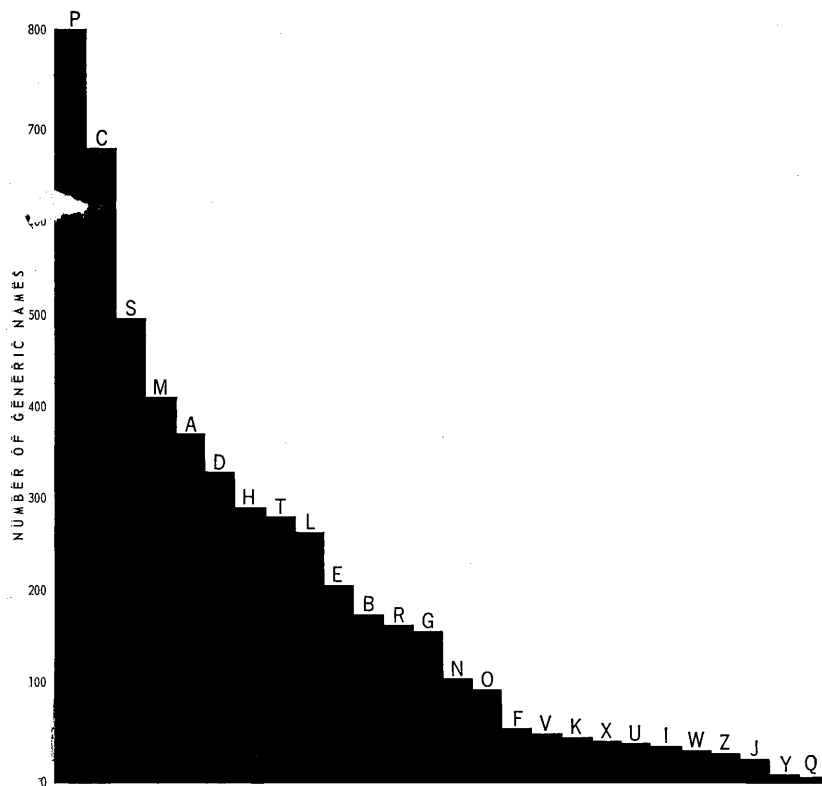


FIG. 1. Histogram showing numbers of fungus generic names in Clements and Shear beginning with each letter of the alphabet. Initial letters are arranged in descending order of frequency of occurrence.

One obvious conclusion may be drawn. It would seem desirable that when a new generic name is being sought, serious consideration should be given to employing as its initial letter one of the following: F, I, J, K, Q, U, V, W, X, Y, Z. It may be argued that these are not found as the initial letters of meaningful prefixes or syllables in Latin or Greek. This is only partly true. In Harper's "Latin Dictionary," while those letters most often used to initiate fungus names are, as might

be expected, preponderant, others found frequently among the fungi are poorly represented, and some of those almost completely neglected by mycologists, notably F, V, and I, are common in Latin, as shown in the following table.

| Letter | Pages of Latin words beginning with that letter |
|--------|--|
| P | 212 |
| C | 251 |
| S | 222 |
| M | 93 |
| A | 214 |
| . | . |
| . | . |
| H | 41 |
| B | 42 |
| G | 34 |
| . | . |
| . | . |
| F | 86 |
| V | 67 |
| I | 134 |

Certain letters—K, W, X and Y, are virtually or completely absent from Latin. Of these, only K is prominently and unambiguously represented in Greek. A comparison of the relative frequency of occurrence of some letters in the new edition of the Liddell and Scott Greek-English Lexicon is given below.

| Letter | Pages of Greek words beginning with that letter |
|--------------|--|
| π (P) | 279 |
| σ (S) | 173 |
| μ (M) | 88 |
| α (A) | 300 |
| . | . |
| . | . |
| κ (K) | 173 |

It may be concluded that of the letters hitherto neglected by the creators of fungus generic names, F, I, K, and V have a considerable unrealized potential. I commend them to mycologists.—W. BRYCE KENDRICK, Mycology Unit, Plant Research Institute, Canada Agriculture, Ottawa, Canada.